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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (5/15): "SETTLEMENTS: THE NEW
PALESTINIAN CATASTROPHE"

Main Stories:

The visit of President Bush to Israel and his May 14 remarks get front page billing. The dailies focus on Bush's statement that, "Israel is the closest ally to the United States in the Middle East." The dailies also highlight his comments that he will continue working towards a peace agreement. Turning attention to the Israeli Premier, the dailies report that Olmert stated that, "it is possible to reach a partial declaration of principles this year." Meanwhile, Ma'an News Agency reports that Secretary Rice "ruled out" the possibility of reaching a peace agreement by the end of the year. An inside page of Al-Quds carries an AP report that judges President Bush's optimism on reaching an agreement in 2008 unfounded and says that the task will have to be left to his successor.

Al-Ayyam leads with, "on the 60th anniversary of the Nakba, the Palestinian people are still here and will not forget." Extensive photos and reports on Nakba commemoration in the Palestinian Territories appear in all dailies. Major protest marches are planned for the Ramallah and Jerusalem areas that will include the release of thousands of black balloons, the dailies report. Ma'an News Agency reports that senior Hamas leader Mahmud Zahhar demanded international recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and stressed the importance of, "not recognizing Israel" in light of Palestinian dispossession. Zahhar harshly criticized the visit of President Bush to Israel to celebrate its 60th anniversary of statehood. Looking to the future, the dailies highlight demographic findings released by the Palestinian bureau of statistics that estimate that the number of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis living in Israel and the Palestinian Territories will be equal by 2016. The Bureau estimates the current population of

Palestinians in the Territories at 105 million.

Al-Quds leads and all papers highlight "threats" made by Israeli Premier Olmert of an possible, impending "wide-scale military operation" in Gaza in response to a May 14 rocket attack on a shopping center in the Israeli city of Ashkelon. Related reporting notes the killing of one Israeli woman and wounding of 15 others in the attack. Reporting identifies the perpetrators as, "Palestinian fighters." Papers suggest that the attack came in retaliation for the killing of six Palestinians in an Israeli airstrike on Gaza on May 1. The dailies also report that Israel has filed a complaint with the UN Security Council regarding the rocket attack. Finally, Al Quds contends that President Bush has shown his support for Israel by fighting Hamas and Hezbollah.

Negative coverage dominates front pages in reporting about the Israeli authorities' decision to build a new settlement in "occupied Jerusalem." Al-Ayyam reports that, Israeli Premier "Olmert's government welcomed Bush with the announcement of a new settlement project." Al-Quds also notes that Olmert approved the building of 600 new housing units in Bitar Eilit settlement in the West Bank. Citing Israeli daily Maarive, Al-Quds reports that Israeli Knesset member of the Shas party Eli Yishay insisted that President Bush allowed Israel to implement the two West Bank settlement projects in Bitar Eilet and Keriat Sefer. Related, negative front page stories announce Israeli intentions to build a Jewish neighborhood and synagogue in the Silwan neighborhood of East Jerusalem. The dailies report that Palestinian President spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudayna stated on May 14 that, "these Israeli decisions run counter to the ongoing peace process." He added that, "we are used to these "needling Israeli decisions that come whenever there is an American

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official visiting."

Al-Quds reports that the leader of the West Bank city Janin area Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces, General Sulayman Amran, stated that, the success of the "Hope and Smile" security campaign in Janin will be the start to Palestinians Authority control of Jenin Governate. He added that the success of the security campaign, that is led by a recent infusion of additional PA security forces, will refute Israeli allegations of chaos and disorder and will accelerate the process of the PA assuming responsibility for security issues [from the Israelis]. The dailies also report that Palestinian security forces have arrested ten Palestinians who are accused of shooting at security forces in the West Bank town of Yatta, south of Hebron.

The dailies report that Quartet Envoy Tony Blair met with Palestinian businessmen in the West Bank city of Jericho on May 14. The group discussed, "Israeli obstacles facing improvements to the business environment in the Palestinians Territories." d

Al-Quds carries an exclusive interview with Israeli Interior Minister Meir Sheehrit who announced that Israeli ID cards will be changed for all Israeli citizens and Jerusalem residents. He added that he supports the idea of conducting a poll to give [Palestinian] residents of Jerusalem the option to remain under Israeli authority or moving to areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority. When asked about family reunification, he stated that Israel cannot give citizenship to "just anyone" who marries an Israeli. He added that getting American citizenship is, "10 times harder than getting an Israeli one." Currently, Israel does not allow West Bank residents to relocate to Jerusalem or Israel to "reunite" with an Israeli spouse, except in rare circumstances.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1. Independent Al-Quds runs an editorial by columnist Sulaiman Al-Wari entitled, "Settlements are the new Palestinian catastrophe" (5/15): "On the sixtieth anniversary of the catastrophe, Israel remains the only occupying country [power] in this modern time. It has not assumed its responsibilities towards the Palestinians who were kicked off their land. Israel is confiscating land, building

the wall, and doubling the number of settlements, all of which is against international and human rights law. This catastrophe resulted in the occupation of the historic, national land of the Palestinians and exiled them from their homeland, thereby establishing the Israeli state... We also should not ignore the fact that settlements aim to take over all Palestinian land and end the dream of an independent Palestinian state...

12. Independent Al-Quds features an op-ed by former Palestinian Authority Minister of Health, Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi entitled, "Sixty years later, Israel is moving backwards" (5/15): "... sixty years later, Israeli institutions still cannot, regardless of all their efforts, discredit the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle for basic human rights. These rights have been recognized by international law; the rights of equality and of freedom to live like the rest of the world... so when Palestinians fight, they fight against discrimination and ethnic cleansing. They also struggle to regain the right of their scattered sons and daughters to come back and live in their country in dignity, like the rest of the world. They also struggle to achieve the right to self-determination so as to regain stolen rights..."

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